Reflection

Project:

From Camp to City

A long term housing strategy for refugee camps by the implementation of a digitally fabricated building system

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Aspect 1: The relationship between research and design in the graduation project

Research is seen as one of the most important aspects of the graduation track within the Architectural Engineering studio. In the first two semesters of the graduation year the research is carried out, resulting in a technical research paper. The last two semesters a design is made based on this technical research.

On the next page is an overview of the different subjects that were researched, divided in technical and architectural research. On the technical side of the research I got a clear image that CNC milling would be the best option for my design, I got familiar with the different examples of building systems already implemented using this technique and from here I could form a clear list of demands which my design should fulfill.

On the architectural side of the research I formulated clear demands for the design and formed a concept how a transitional shelter could grow into a real home. The location research was pushed to the second half year because of a lack of time.

When starting the design phase, it felt that certain aspects were missing in my research to start designing in a successful manner. The research was all focused on the shelter and the technical elaboration of this, but not on the larger scales. How these shelters would work in relation to each other and how the dynamics of a refugee camp would work were still big question marks. So instead of starting the design I continued my research, although this led me to new insights and I gained a lot of new knowledge on this complex subject it also clouded my vision. With the introduction of new scale levels and new sub design subjects the design task became too complex and too big.

Also some (in hindsight) unfortunate design decisions were made. For example the decision to focus on IDP’s in three different locations at once created too much uncertainties and too little grip on the subject. Combined with an unflitting choice of the construction system and the above described increasing complexity of the subject caused me to lose control over the project and led to a blockade. For weeks I was unproductive and I stood still in my design process.

It was just before my P4 that with some profound course changes I regained the overview and could move further again. Unfortunately this was too little too late to pass the P4. Although the choice to continue researching instead of designing partly led to a blockade in the design process it also led to more depth in my design; the relationship between the research and the design is bittersweet.
Aspect 2: The relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject chosen by the student within this framework
The Architectural Engineering studio knows three main themes: flow, stock and make. In addition to the themes, there are also pre-selected locations, as Bandung or the van Gendthallen. Within these themes and locations it is allowed to give shape to your own assignment and you are encouraged to start this assignment from your personal fascinations. My fascinations of digital fabrication and emergency housing fell within the theme of make but not within any of the locations provided by the studio. This provided me with a certain freedom, but perhaps this was a bit too much freedom and too little constraints and context.

Aspect 3: The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen by the student
The Architectural Engineering studio method focusses on the relationship between technological innovation and architecture. Technological innovation is often the inspiration for the architectural design. With the method of doing a technical research first and then making a design this correlation is encouraged. As described earlier this transition between research and design didn’t go very smoothly. To bridge this gap between research and architecture research by design is encouraged as a research method. In my research I used this tool too little, perhaps if I made more use of it the connection between research and design would be stronger.

Aspect 4: The relationship between the project and the wider social context
With over 59 million displaced people worldwide emergency housing is a very relevant subject and providing adequate housing for these people is a huge problem, in the short term but in the long term as well. This project can be a solution to also provide refugee housing in the long term, something which is now often overlooked.